RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PROPOSED NATIONAL ISLANDS PLAN

SUBMISSION FROM HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND

Thank you for seeking our views on the draft National Islands Plan. We have issued our comments to both the parliamentary committee and the Islands Plan Team. We welcome the preparation of the plan and would offer the following comments.

Do you think the 13 Strategic Objectives in the proposed National Islands Plan are the right ones to meet the needs of island communities?

In response to the invitation for views earlier this year on the potential content of the National Islands Plan and islands communities impact assessment guidance we pointed to the significant cultural, social and economic contribution the historic environment makes to our islands. We therefore welcome that a strategic objective has been included that covers Arts, Culture and Language. However, given the pressures on the historic environment noted within the plan (such as those arising in response to both climate change and tourism) as well as the recognition of the island communities’ strong feelings about preserving built heritage it would be beneficial to have a specific objective under Strategic Objective 11 that supports the sustainable management of the historic environment.

Fuel poverty is recognised by the Islands Act as a key issue that the Islands Plan should include proposals for action and we are pleased to see this feature prominently within the Proposed Plan. Historic Environment Scotland is currently working in partnership with bodies from Ireland, Sweden, Finland and the Faroe Islands supported by the European Union on the Energy Pathfinder Project. This project recognises that historic buildings represent one of the biggest challenges for improving energy efficiency in the Northern Periphery and Arctic Region. As part of this project, selected historic buildings will be monitored for energy use before and after retrofit in order to establish the benefits of different measures and provided data for an online toolkit. We hope that the outputs from this project could help in the delivery across a number of objectives of the plan such as fuel poverty, climate change and historic environment protection and we would welcome the opportunity to explore this during the preparation of the Implementation Strategy.

Do you have any comments on the actions outlined to support effective implementation of the Proposed Plan?

We welcome the actions under Strategic Objective 13 regarding the implementation of the National Islands Plan. As noted above, a great deal of research has been carried out in terms of the historic environment and climate change, tourism as well as socio-economic assessments. We would be happy to discuss these research findings and its supporting data to identify ways that it can be used to inform our understanding of the challenges and opportunities for island communities and their built environment.
Does the proposed Plan align with the Scottish Government’s renewed focus on climate change issues, following its announcement of a climate change emergency?

As the plan recognises, the impacts of climate change are a significant issue for our island communities and environments. We therefore welcome that Strategic Objective 9 recognises the importance of resilient adaptation plans in tackling the effects of climate change. The historic environment across our islands is particularly vulnerable to impacts such as coastal erosion, sea-level rise and changing patterns of extreme weather events.

Historic Environment Scotland, in partnership with University of the Highlands and Islands, James Cook University (JCU, Australia), Orkney Islands Council, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) and ICOMOS Climate Change and Heritage Working Group recently held a workshop on Orkney in order to prepare a Climate Vulnerability Index assessment for the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage site. This report covered both an assessment of the vulnerability of the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site as well as community vulnerability. The assessment of community vulnerability covered issues such as the economic, social and cultural importance of the site for the local community and the potential impact of any loss, as well as its resilience to climate change risk.

While focused on the Orkney WHS, the findings of this report are important in understanding the issues facing islands communities and the historic environment in the face of climate change more generally. We would therefore recommend that the findings of this report are considered during the preparation of the Implementation Strategy for this strategic objective.

Finally, we look forward to working with all stakeholders in delivering the aspirations of the Islands Plan.